

“White Towel”
Media Production Activity
(use with the Storyboard Form)

Objectives:

- To reinforce the concept of target audiences, and how messages can be crafted for a specific audience through visuals, language and sound
- To give students practice in planning out an audiovisual message using a "storyboarding" framework to plan the characters, background, voiceovers, music or other sound, and any written text that will be on the screen
- To provide the context for a discussion of stereotypes
- To foster small group collaboration

Appropriate for: grades 5 and older; participants in media literacy workshops

Time: 30-60 minutes, depending on the size of the class and number of groups presenting.

Materials: Storyboard forms (see separate document) for each group
(recommended) Several white towels for groups to use in
planning and in their presentations

Activity:

1. Divide the class (or group) into small groups of 4-5 students (participants).
Give each group a storyboard form.
2. Explain that each group will be designing a TV commercial to sell a white towel. They'll need to come up with a name for their product, decide what characters will be in the commercial (if any), what the background and

setting will be like, how the "story" will unfold, what the voiceover will say, what kind of music will be playing, etc. They will fill out all of this on their Storyboard Form, sketching a rough visual for each "scene."

3. Explain, however, that **each group** will be designing their commercial for a **different target audience**. You should not announce the group's target audience aloud – but instead, either write it on their storyboard form or tell each group quietly what their target audience is.

The basic target audiences that work well are:

- adult women
- adult men
- college students (which could be separate groups for males and females)
- teens
- children, ages 3-9 (which could be targeted to parents to buy the product for children to use, or to the children themselves)

Other possibilities: older adults, infants (similar to children), athletes, people in different occupations (doctors, veterinarians, car mechanics, etc.). For a large group or class, you could assign the same target audience to two different groups to see how similar or different the media constructions are.

4. Give the students (participants) 10-15 minutes to design their commercials, and then ask each group to share their storyboard with the class.
5. Have each group start by giving the name of their product, but not their target audience. Have them describe or act out the scenes in their commercial.

6. When the group is finished, have the other students (participants) guess the target audience, giving their “evidence” from the commercial. Discuss the effectiveness of the commercial in targeting that specific audience, and if appropriate, ways that it could be improved to better target that audience.
7. If there is time, and if appropriate, discuss some of the stereotypes that showed up in the commercials (gender, age, etc.), and why commercials so often rely on stereotypes to get across their messages in a short amount of time. One technique that can be used to accomplish this is to have students close their eyes, and imagine the scenes in each commercial (with the teacher/leader summarizing each commercial). Then with their eyes still closed, have them raise their hands if any of the characters they imagined were people of color. If that percentage is fairly small, the teacher might want to lead a discussion about assumptions and biases that we all bring to our creations (and that advertisers bring their biases and assumptions to the creation and casting of commercials as well).